



## The Wanderer

A Narrative Poem (Sequel to "Twenty and After") And Other Poems

NATHANIEL A. BENSON

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my friend, Thure Hedman

TORONTO, CANADA.

with the sincere and of

regard of

Nathaniel a. Benson

oronto

The Wanderer and Other Poems is Mr. Benson's third published volume of poetry. The long poem, "The Wanderer," which begins this volume is a sequel to his "Twenty and After," which won the Jardine Memorial Award at the University of Toronto in 1926, when he was but twenty-two, and was published by the Ryerson Press in March, 1927. "The Wanderer," a romantic, autobiographical narrative, slightly over a thousand lines in length is a sincere attempt on the poet's part to delineate the experiences of his youth. His early dreams, loves, fears and emotions are clearly revealed and presented He tells of his wanderings in the United States and the Dominion, of Canada's Northland, of Winnipeg, the prairie provinces, Banff and the Rockies. He describes vividly as an eye-witness Canada's Diamond Jubilee of Confederation at Ottawa in July 1927, when Lindbergh's squadron visited the Capital, and the impressive ceremonies at the celebration of the Centenary of his alma mater, the University of Toronto, in October 1927.

Another interesting feature of the poem is his graphic reference to various Canadian poets who have been his intimate friends, Charles G. D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Wilson Macdonald and E. J. Pratt.

To my Triend,
Prof. Thuri Hedman,
from Nathaniel a. Benson

# ODE FOR DOMINION DAY 28/8/30.

NATHANIEL A. BENSON

When Cartier first saw Hochelaga's height And on Mount Royal reared the fleur-de-lys, When dawn swept down the age-long savage night, Was Canada conceived in majesty.

God, keep within us yet that dauntless flame Of old courageous days,

When hearts were stout and hands were truly strong; Of those who from the valorous centuries came Still let us stride the ways,

And tribulation never shall be long! O Canada, unveil for us the splendid past, That thy first glorious hours may sanctify these last.

II

That we might wear this present nationhood, Daulac drew sword, and sought Death to the end: For us Brock gave an English hero's blood, And dark Tecumseh did our fields defend.

Far on the veldt, and on the crimsoned Somme New generations proved The Empire free as their Canadian home. Now over many a field the stars are calm Where heroes sleep beloved.

And there Remembrance shall for ever come. These are our heritage, and these our rightful pride; God grant that we may live as nobly as they died.

III

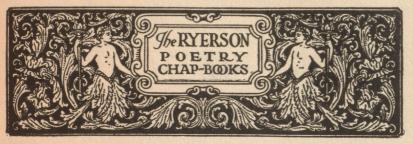
The hero's deed, the lonely poet's theme Enshrine a nation's greatness—these we have, A strange magnificence of deed and dream That mocks the years and burns above the grave; England and France flow kindred in one vein, The dreaming Celt and Scot.

The Norseman all his sea-born valor brings,
The magic melancholy of the Ukraine,—
All these are subtly wrought
In one vast anthem our Dominion sings:
From ancient kingdoms' hopes a People shall arise
To write their steadfast faiths across the Western skies.

### IV

We are a people marching down the ages,
O'er golden seas, beyond the mountains' crest;
Our legacy of warriors, bards and sages
Shall guide us still on truth's and beauty's quest.
God, let our dreams be deep, our deeds be fair,
And let our spirits be
Imbued with all that was, that future time
Shall see a new Dominion which will dare,
For right and liberty,

Attain new peaks and victories more sublime. My country, Canada, land of auspicious birth, Arise, and let thy youth inspire the lands of Earth!



### The Wanderer

By Nathaniel A. Benson

\* \* \*

### **INVOCATION**

I

NOT FOR the weak, submissive souls
Life's lightning leaps, doom's thunder rolls,
For dully, slowly comes the breath
Of men whose love would dare not death,
Who would not raise in ecstasy
A desperate cup eternally
And drink to life, that mistress stern
Whose wonders fade, whose sorrows burn.

#### II

Count me the hearts that throbbed and dared, Looked on the world and never cared For exile and for loneliness
To win one hour with loveliness,
To grasp one diamond of delight
Out of the thunder and the night—
For these alone have fought and won Immortal triumph never done.

I, too, would join that deathless band
And kiss in homage each scarred hand
That waved a battered standard high
And dared the fury of the sky,
Who backed a proud eternal word
With broken, yet unconquered sword,
Who crossed the land and spanned the sea
For dreams and loves that could not be!

### I

### MY DEDICATION

BEFORE a lonely hearth whose ashes were Each a past glory greyed in flames of time, I sat, and on my knee I held awhile My life's loved coffer, locked for many years; And yet I knew beneath the carven lid There lay experience that few had known. At seventeen three friends had I, and these Were dreamers, grasping at the precious hour Of fortune, fame, and even costlier things. Four comrades, picturesque nomads we were. Artist, musician, scientist the third And I, who worshipped Shelley, Byron, Keats, Masters of ecstasy in poetry, Dreamed early of that immortality So poorly dowered by men, but passing all In its incomparable wealth of soul.

Time passed and, in four bitter, toilsome years, I learnt at Failure's stool the crushing price Man pays for crying: 'My soul shall be free!' Adversity, no understanding given, The paltriness of my own heart and brain, Dry pedagogues who lacked all sympathy And cried that literature was long since dead When its sad spark lay suppliant at their feet Waiting its morrow of maturity.

I loved a little and my humour kept My feet on earth, my head above the clouds. My friend, the artist, found his destined mate And married, so forsaking art for love. Now often do I doubt my dreams' pale glow
When I stand looking in his infant's eyes,
See them like little jewels that dance and gleam—
A son—a treasure I may never know
Envy of comfort, anguish for content,
These are the swords that bar the poet's way—
Yet he has all the passion of all earth,
Trembles for beauty and doth worship love
With an unquenched, though often-answered fire.

These are the poet's family, only these:
The stars, whose infinite light and mystery
Shine as the vestal ideal in his soul
Or as the eyes of loved ones yet unknown;
The rivers and the trees whose music wakes
The unsung anthems in a poet's heart;
The clouds, the single realm where he beholds
The castellated mansions of his dreams,
Kingdoms that never were and cannot be,
The seen fulfillment of his visioning—
And there's the wind—by night he wakes and hears
His unborn children crying in the wind.

### II

### SPRINGTIDE

My second friend, of scientific mind, Had soon to leave our land, but left to me A legacy of joy, a cousin sweet Who grew to love me even as he did. She watched with me the pale and flickering light Of my poor genius, dim at twenty years; She loved and gave me all that women may: Tender, sweet, understanding, confidence, And faith triumphant in my poetry, Faith then unmerited. For she believed Me destined to high fame and noble things; She gave me books of all the gods I owned: Shelley and Byron, Keats and Rupert Brooke, Beloved Burns. In later days I turned My riper mind to Browning and to him Who drew a world of light from during dark, And last, I did approach that mighty mind, The mightiest work of man's mortality,

Voice of the world, all-knowing, feeling all. Friend to the ostler, brother to the king, Who read the tragedy in princes' hearts. Our minds drank deep and from these fountain-heads Consumed a wisdom never elsewhere gained. For two rich years, twenty and twenty-one, She gave my life a glory that comes once, Fades then forever, or is dulled in marriage. We might have married, had it so been willed, Lost rapture's spring in resignation's fall. Happy was I, and happiness I gave, Sweet as the precious flower of one day. And now her lasting comfort has been found With my third friend whose music thus may be Filled with the glory of inspiration. Fate has ordained and I am well content

### III

### THE POETS

Even then my judgment was not wholly formed; My mind was undisciplined and my thoughts Vague, evanescent, and most indistinct. I postured in the way of petty men Who think to take on stature, being strange, Yet in my heart I doubted still my power, Knew my own littleness and tried to learn The arduous way unto the snowy peak. 'Twas there I met a songstress true and sweet, Who gave me friendship's key unto the portal Where dwelt a mind pre-eminent in our land.

That night in June I met, one year ago,
Roberts, the patriarch of our native tongue,
Whose garnered knowledge of a lifetime's depth
Makes him more kindly, younger, and humane,
Wise as the years, although he seems to own
The matchless secret of eternal youth.
This singer of an olden Doric lay,
To whom revealed are all of nature's ways,
Her mysteries, the record of her rocks,
In days before mankind had come to birth;
Well he knew Browning, Arnold and Swinburne,
The vast, dim giants of old glorious years;

Knew ill-starred Wilde, and gay Le Gallienne. He awoke Lampman, sponsored long ago, That deep, fresh mind and gentle-hearted man Who read 'Orion' and did dedicate Himself unto the high immortal cause. Patriot, comrade and historian, Scholar in ancient and concealed love, Poet and lover of all humankind, He termed me poet and has granted me Friendship and understanding sympathy. I leave untold the gratitude I feel, Save that the gallant "vagrant of old time," The genius who pursues his wailing ghost O'er peak and mire, over dark fen and hill, Is greatened over all by life's strange quest.

As one who marvelled, seeing Shelley plain, I too have seen a spirit wandering, Carman, the pagan faun and minstrel, come Singing from Arcady and Sapphic isles The sweetest music of our western world. Kindly and gentle, yet remote from men As carefree satyrs of the Grecian time, He was a haunter of that mystic place Where fade the real and dreamt-of into one, The borderland of twilight where his race Danced long ago beneath a phantom sun, While wanton winds their love were whispering And dark, unhurrying stars were hanging low, While nightingales in oaks were lingering To teach him music of true lyric flow.

I have the friendship of MacDonald, he,
The eager genius of the magic line
Who hears the very sadness of the sea
And kneels at Melancholy's sombre shrine,
Ununderstood by all who have not known
Ceaseless frustration in all things but dreams,
Whose heart is as an empty shadowed throne
Kept lonelier by memory's tired streams;
The foe of man's injustice, whose ideal
Burns, a white fire for human brotherhood,
Who waits the inevitable Time to feel
That mortal hearts are purged of all save good.

I have known Pratt, and touched the manly hand Of that Titanic singer of far time, Whose force and fantasy the ages spanned To live in brilliant and terrific line. His eyes are merry and clear; his humour wakes In broad satire, devoid of mockery, Until he sings, when old Atlantic breaks, The sorrow of the Everlasting Sea.

### IV YOUTH

Three magic things alone make poetry. The heart of him who writes, its primal soil, Wherefrom there flower unvisioned violets; The many marvellous suns of greater men, Whose enduring speech brings summer to the soul; The third, the intensest element of all, The ever-falling irised rains of love Come from the faery deeps of maidens' eyes-Rains like the tears of saints in Paradise, Unclouded showers of light and silver fire Born in twin heavens, azure worlds, or pools Of sepian shadow. For a woman's eye Is the sole crystal where a poet sees The pale procession of his lonely dreams, Wrapped in unwonted splendor, passing by; Here all his ultimate fancies are no more Mere wild imaginings, for they arise So dressed to make their parent-spirit dumb, Trailing long veils of samite from their wings Across his troubled sight, until he drops His eyelids on all weary daily scenes And cries: "The world's no more the drab, dull world! Earth rolls resplendent-I am loved and love!" Not once, but many times, have I been touched

Not once, but many times, have I some by this same miracle of glorious strength Flaming along my blood, and bearing me To summits of the spirit where I saw A world that wakes, a fresh and wondrous world, The radiant sphere imagination knows.

After my desolation, two years past, I fled my native city to escape The memories that haunted every street, And queried why I henceforth walked alone. Far in a thundering mart of wealth and power, Cleveland, I came to know that mighty race Still indivisible with us and quick To offer hands of friendship, to crush out The lingering pangs of melancholy's pain. Upon a warm and sandy golden beach I read by morning, heard the southern wind Play joyously across the sheltering trees; I was the playfellow of sun and rain, Felt the warm earth, a bosom vast and strong Surging beneath me, or I ran to plunge In Erie's kindly arms of heaving blue. By night I watched the lightning flashing free Out from Ontario, or I did stray Down roaring streets agleam with yellow day, While all about me marched reverberant The giant feet of vast America. The pauper, beggar and the derelict, A brotherhood I never thought to know, Drew me to them in deeper sympathy. I gazed on mighty temples that were built To Mammon and his brazen sons of gold; I guessed that I, at twenty-two, beheld Triumph that will outlast the stones of Thebes, For these were Parthenons of wealth's grim power:

### SKYSCRAPER

I sit not as the Pyramid
For centuries upon the sands;
I rose but yesterday amid
A million hurried hammering hands.

The stars I challenge in the night,
The sun I meet in molten day;
A man-built mountain bearing might,
A monument to mortal clay.

A yellow-flaming word I burn
In heaven all the midnight hours
Above a multitude that turn
To marvel at their puny powers.

They reared me, and I hold them still
Between my iron ribs to toil;
I wield my long-relentless will
And all their strongest efforts foil.

I am the might that is not man,
Though all my might man gave to me.
Far dawns and sunsets I shall scan
When my creators cease to be.

The hill am I that ants have built,
If they be crushed, I shall not crumble;
Though all man's gold be turned to gilt,
My generations rise and rumble.

The whispers that I hear within
Proclaim the truth that man is able
To speak his thousand tongues of sin,
To build his God a braver Babel.

Now God is wealth, a giant gold, A Mound made higher year by year, A Calf of daily increase told By hundreds' faith and millions' fear.

I am the Temple, sounding not A trumpet calling men to strife; They come unbidden, hasting hot To earn the bitter bread of life.

With even strong electric eyes
Reminding men of toil to come,
I nightly gaze across deep skies
And hear the morrow's rolling drum.

By day all quietude forsaking,
By night on sleepless watch I tower,
My sound and silence ever making
Immortal Voice of mortal power!

Months afterward I came back joyously, Back to my home, and to that well-loved place Of learning, whose full nature steadily Flowed strong within me, till at last I felt That I was one with all the singing leaves, The deep autumnal beauty and the stones,
The spires, the ancient halls, and windows filled
With a rich, dim and mediæval light.
Not all the pomp of pedantry grown dull
Round its own echo could affray my heart;
I planned strong things and did them every one—
I vowed that I should wake and contribute
Whatever talent lay within my soul
To commemorate the treasured, youthful hours
Passed in that semi-legendary ground.

Lost in my efforts I awoke one day To find that love had tried a long-locked door; I met, by chance, a fragile, lovely girl Born to be the destroyer of her peace. Not Baudelaire or Dowson ever strove With subtler mind to slay his own content Than she whose childish ardor was misspent Creating monsters for her own dismay. She was companion unto revelry And ceased to sorrow more for happiness Until her faith in life and love were fled. I. once betraved by loved one, and by friend, She, mocking what was once a joyous world, Were cast like mariners on a desolate isle And there our tired hands built up a bower Of faith and glory that surpassed our hopes. We walked a dismal shore in winter's cold While the gaunt moon poured icy silver down Into a sapphire bracelet that she wore, Cold as her heart before, yet burning now With all the passion of our new-found love. Three winter months of precious happiness Were ours, before the inevitable came. I could not stay the course of Destiny And she returned unto that darksome bourne Of careless sorrow.

Then, as often since,
Fate with her enigmatic hands returned,
In her strange, generous way, a recompense,
One of the loveliest spirits ever born
Out of the soundless deeps of mystery.
Gilda was fair above mere loveliness,
For through her eyes of azured crystal shone
The luminous glory of a lovely soul;

Even as, at the hour of moonrise, falls The quiet silver rain on a violet prism In some unpeopled fane of sanctity. So shone unconsciously the light serene Born in the inner shrine of Gilda's heart. Great orchids dreaming in slim candle light, Fantastic shapes of never-never lands, Even a lonely poet's unvoiced dreams Came down and found a haven on her breast. Oh, there are islands where the feet of man Have left untrodden all the sunlit sands, And only voices from sweet unseen streams Sing, while the waves from leagues of lucent sea Answer in measured cadence; there are isles That never heard the thunder of the world. Gilda was even so, for life's vast wind Had blown over her, as a hurricane Might spare the tranquil mirror of a pool, And passing, draw a gentle zephyr's veil Across that lovely blue in tenderness. Beauty of spirit, form and attitude Were hers; beauty she gave to sombre life, And in return life tendered that same gift. Most natural was this, for as a lake Slumbers in morning underneath the sky, Its glass returns to God the stainless light Of His dominions and His bounteousness. Each moment passed with Gilda seemed to be Clothed in an iridescent amber glow. Her home, a tiny castle on a hill, A very place of dear enchantment hid From eyes that never cared to understand; 'Twas there I went through winter's dazzling snow When myriad diamonds glistened at my feet, Paving the lovely way to Lyonnesse. My very breath, fast-rising in the frost, Seemed to enfold me in a pearly mist Of Oberon's unearthly fashioning. Down the dim path to Gilda's castle-gate I walked, and watched the window's orange light, Bright, ever brighter, until all the house Seemed like a fairy's cave in Oramar Where, on wide wings of wonder, gently glide Pale glimmering legions and mysterious hosts.

Still I remember how her hair would gleam Golden as all the pastures of the sun, And to my half-closed eyes it often shone Like phantom seas that roll across the mind Wave upon amber wave, without a sound. She was a childish Lilith with the power To see the eerie marvels of that World Whose folk in song and dance and beauty move Not far removed from us, invisible To all save Gilda, who lived wondering, A strange, rapt exile from a mystic sphere. Well I remember passing slowly by Her little castle. She was far away, And yet there lingered on a fragrance there To which I sang, in the silence of my heart:

Leave me not, leave me not,
Rest with your lover;
Grieve me not, grieve me not,
Summer is over.
Silent your castle stands,
Still in the night,
Still as a maiden's hands
Pale in moonlight.

Leave me not, leave me not,
Deep is my sadness;
Give me one lovely thought
Born of your gladness.
Clouded the summer-moon,
Over dark trees;
Autumn comes swift and soon
Sorrowing these.

Leave me not, leave me not,
Lonely is life;
I give my love unsought,
Flower of life.
Night-winds on shadow-feet
Bear you this blossom,
Lay it but lightly sweet,
Light on your bosom.

To plead with circumstance is all in vain, And now has Gilda gone forever from me, Forevermore, and henceforth has become The loveliest month of youth's enchanted year.

Once and again the restless tide
Of time draws outward unto sea,
That sea, Forever, where abide
All beauties well beloved of me.

Once and again the sombre deep Rolls out and onward, bearing far A silver shallop that doth keep A silent tryst with one dark star,

And in that silver shallop sleeps
A little golden dream's delight,
Gliding across the soundless deeps,
And riding seaward far to-night—

Grief moves, a spectre, through my blood,
For I may touch no more, nor sing
Your slim gold beauty whose white bud
Will never know another spring.

### "TORONTO'S" CENTENARY

NE year ago my spiritual home, My well-loved home for seven fruitful years, Attained with pride its centenary's peak. From Canada and all the lands of earth Came scholars of acclaim and far renown; Came all the great who, once within these walls, Walked humbly hopeful of a larger day, And with them came (I never pause to doubt) The invisible ranks of all our martial sons, Youthful and smiling, cleansed of wounds and pain, When we put by all save nobility To celebrate our great historic Day. Much from my mind will pass ere I forget The splendour and the beauty of that hour; The slow, insistent, measured, mournful march Built on the even rolling thrill of drums Was grandly played, while through the tower-arch There filed in meet and solemn majesty The pageant of a mediaeval day.

Twelve

Men of high learning, of accomplishment, Honoured in all the earth, grave men who would Make nations one in love of intellect And banish Ignorance and Prejudice. The dumb sire and deaf dam of monstrous War. These princes of the highest mortal realm, The kingdom of the unconquerable mind. Passed with a reverend mien and tread august. With dark robes trailing and with splendid hoods Of scarlet, purple, gold and royal blue. Thousands assembled—deepest silence fell, As that proud dirge, "O Valiant Hearts," was heard. Low over all the crowd I seemed to see A khaki legion bend with banners furled, A young lost legion perished long ago, Whose unreluctant yielding of their youth Knows no reward, no recompense for death Unless we listen as they whisper back

"We have not died in vain,
Nor poured our precious blood
Back into earth again
In royal crimson flood,
We have not died in vain
For death is victory
If we have taught again
Truth and Humanity."

Now once again did enigmatic Fate
And old bewildering Destiny give to me
A richer comfort than the joy I lost.
Always I dreamed to meet a poetess,
To have the instinctive blessed sympathy
That only genius owns and shares with all.
She was a poetess of perfect song,
Voicing the saddest thought in measure sweet.
I worshipped and respected her; we loved,
And yet, together lonely as the stars,
She, a remote and silent solitary
Whose fires were ever chaste and cold and white;
I, whose intensity has made my life
A rugged country where the loveliest vales
And peaks of unbowed granite alternate.

Despite our difference, deep stimulus Was given us by the strange contending tides Of nature, and our poetry reborn.

June came-how gentle, maiden-fair is June. Stealing upon the quiet countryside Where flower, tree and meadow smile once more In fresh and virgin emerald. What delight, To wander silent roads in country-night, When each dark grove becomes a glade of love Draped with deep veils of shadowed mystery! The moon of this most lovely month to me Seems a white vestal pouring silver wine, Youth's own libation over all the earth. She is the enchantress whispering magic words To lovers' listening ears, and it is she Who leads them gently on in secret paths Of raptured tenderness. Her ardent fire, Blent with the ruby flame of unkissed lips, Ripens the wine of dreaming in our hearts. I never knew the brazen lips of Fame, The cloying golden kiss when Fortune bends-I never knew them, and I care no jot If never in this life I know their touch, Since there is given me most bounteously God's greatest gift, the sovereign joy of Love. Not once, but many times, such happiness Was granted me that I did wonder long, Knowing such glory passed my meriting. Not once, but many times, yet of the best, O dark, dear lovely head the night that I First held your quiet beauty in my arms;

The moon's pale silver seemed that night
A stream from Paradise,
A kindred river of strange light
Homing toward your deep eyes.

Soft as the midnight wind your face And shadow-dark your hair; Your hands were fairies winged with grace, White in the darkness there,

Downward I bent—as with no sound
That silver river slips—
And in the perfect silence found
The moonlight on your lips.

Fourteen

### MY COUNTRY

O Canada, my country, lead me on, As all this glowing summer thou hast done! Always I was a vagabond at heart And ever was a wanderer in soul. Although I never left my native street. Strangely I loved the place where I was born, A sleepy, quiet, maple-shaded cottage. Long years ago great poplar-sentinels, With leaves like ocean, sang to me, a child, And long ago there was a dear old garden With lilacs, hollyhocks and tiger-lilies, Roses and morning-glories, daisies bright With ivy wandering gently over all. There would my well-loved grandmother and I Hide in the leaves from every mortal eve. And she would tell me stories of the flowers. I was eleven when she journeyed far To where in gardens it is always spring, And where some day she'll tell me sweeter tales, Tell on, and on, until I quite forget Life ever taught me all there was to know.

Even the old street has vanished quite away, And a new structure, symbolic of our time Brick houses, roaring cars, and cold square lights Replace its peace. But I was never one, (Much as I love to dwell upon the past) To discountenance the future, nor who failed To catch the music of the present time. I see the colour and the gay movement Circling about me; comic unwashed Jews, Guttural and stinking, marvellously fecund, Quarrel in their shops, while loud Italians Jabber and shout, drink deep and play guitars And those of the Double Isles who have laid by Their courage, hope and all their pride of race, Content to labour as unworthier men.

Here was I born, and lived, and seldom moved Until I journeyed east to Ottawa To walk alone on storied Parliament Hill. How lovely that July, the Capital— Flags streaming and grey towers against the blue, Fair uniforms that dazzled one; poor courtiers Skipping silk-breeched around the taxicabs And wooden fellows in their tall silk hats With minds like rat-traps, catching golden rats, And given many "columns" when they died. I straved round Lovers' Walk in Ottawa, Felt the clear heat, and marvelled at the skies Seeming to withhold the slightest trace of storm Until Confederation Day had passed. Beyond the river stretched the ancient meadows Of old Quebec, and far to the north-east The purple dim Laurentians grandly lay. I saw the Conqueror of Ocean come With twelve winged knights to honour and to draw More closely two great nations in one love. A darker Aviator came with them, Breathed on their wings, and one was hurled to death. With minute-guns, low-trailing arms, and all The sable pomp of woe, his cortege passed. And well might kings envy his obsequies Whose funeral hymn the loud propellers roared. 'Twas then I heard the statesmen bawl their words, And ape good Bossuet a score of times. One cannot hear with an untroubled calm A score of crows attempt to caw the fame, The beauty of a phoenix lost on them.

One year passed by, and Destiny ordained That I should see the beauties of my land, Rich wonders which have left me small desire To view the marvels of more distant climes. Deep in remembrance, as a treasure-chest, I stir these jewels that my eyes have seen: Red sunrise in the Northland, like a flame Leaping across majestic hills of pine, Flowing like molten gold athwart the blue Of each unstirred and ever-slumbering lake; Great forests whose immeasurable hearts Are silent altars whither no man goes. Grim is the North, inimical to man And loth to yield her fortresses sublime. The red rocks rise in cold austerity, Gnarled and malign, like spectres of a race Born in fierce travail when the greenish glow Of chill Aurora spanned the ancient dark In the first week of an informate world;

These rocks like craggy castles breast the air And keep the banners of silence yet unbowed. Down from their crests cruel shapes jut savagely, Like dragons snarling from a rugged lair. Mile upon mile the blasted woodlands reach, Raped by great fires for many a ruined league. Westward the forests in full beauty wake, And mighty rivers hurl their springtide strength In turbulence toward the inland sea, The Empress of all lakes, Superior, A frigid basilisk whose great cold eyes Look pitilessly on the fisherfolk Whose little huts are huddled on the shore. Far off, half-hidden in a bluish haze, Great capes cleave out above the whelming waste Like the gigantic flanks left unsubmerged When some Triassic monster roared and drowned. This is a coast inhospitable, stern, A waste of unforgiving waters, yet Not even the Mediterranean fairer seems Than the long bays and archipelagoes, Infrequent beauties, rare and dominant.

I journeyed on and reached the Double Ports Where the vast elevators line the coast, Seeming like mighty ghosts, or as the homes Of supermen in a mechanic age. I crossed to Manitoba in the dawn, Where countless lakes were stirring in the sun And casting off an icy cloak of mist; Then Winnipeg, the young metropolis, A fortress of the eastern money-kings, Rich in romantic colour, vivid, clear, Each street a drama in its eager self: Ranchers sun-tanned, in chaps and broad sombrero, Rovers from eastern Europe gaily scarved, Tall Scandinavian fellows golden-haired, Manly, and stalwart; blond Ukrainian maids Like John Keats' women in their loveliness. The smiling Irishman, the Indian Whose weary spirit slumbers in his eyes Surrendering to Time, and white man's law. The garish glamor of the swarthy men, And voluptuous beauty of the women come From southern lands, the old Canadians

Easily known, who held this western land
Against the crafty Riel and his strong cause;
A line of noble buildings set on Portage
Sloping in grandeur toward the setting sun;
A great stained "mogul" panting forth its steam,
Drawing with its steel strength the grain-heaped cars—
All this, a symphony reverberant,
A strong-limbed nation on its upward march,
Young and exultant, striding History's road.

And then at evening, out Kildonan way, Where the Red River winds most peacefully Down past the quiet gardens; there the trees Await the silent, silver summer-moon. Who drops her diamonds on the river's breast, And pours her benison of purest light Upon the darkness of the shaded shores. Never my eyes beheld a lovelier sward, Nor ever saw so well that After-day When light and darkness, melting into one, Dispel one's gloom, the other's gaudiness And leave the world a dream of silvered blue. Lovely that river-garden was, and yet I think its magic might have saddened me With dull remembrance of young ardor lost, Had not the moon's pale glory touched that night A paler and more glorious golden head, Had not the stars found other mystic fires In soft blue eyes that tenderly met mine.

Onward I journeyed over that great land, A golden sea of coming fruitfulness So vast the mind may scarcely understand A lonely land, a land that's limitless From north to south, from fading east to west That scarcely undulates its mighty plain. The prairie cities hum with energy, Unspoiled and rich with promise yet to come; These cities pass, and great cloud-legions form Huge in the east as some pursuing host; Darkness comes down, and red the western moon Mounts slowly, and sublimely, till it seems Like some great golden world that rolls with ours. The little towns of wide Saskatchewan Cling to the rails; the elevators pass Like giants in the night; the sudden dawn Glows palely from the north toward the south.

Alberta wakes, and sloping hills appear
With little farms; kerchiefed old women stand,
Wave to our progress; merry children, men
Bronzed with long suns and strengthened by stern toil
Greet our swift passing with a friendly hand.
Tall riders of the range swoop galloping
On distant winding roads.

I have not seen A city now remembered with more joy Than Calgary, the fair embodiment Of all the youthful power of the West; Its beauty unconfined, its air as clear As that above the ocean, and its people The very symbols of deep kindliness. How happy I was there, where morning heavens Shone with a rich immensity of light! All these loved lands, I found, were wondrous steps Leading me onward to the mountains' realm, The Rockies (there is magic in that word!). I waited; as a child on Christmas Eve, I hoped that they might equal my long dreams-And slowly, like a host invincible, They rose in age-old, splendid dignity, Fronting the stars, and warring with the winds! Those grand relentless Titans of the past, God's battlements, immeasurably grand!

### VI

### LYONNESSE

There in Banff's castle, in baronial halls
Mocking the name of man-made luxury,
There, by the thunder of Bow River's Falls,
I touched the ultimate in ecstasy.
All else that comes, whatever future time.
All that is yet to be, and all that thrills,
Must needs fall short of joy that was sublime,
My happiness by those eternal hills!
One never walked in Eden all alone
And found a truly-unmarred Paradise;
I wandered blindly toward joy's shining throne
Until I saw it in a loved one's eyes.
She gave me love: the tenderness and peace
Known only in the touch of loving hands—

Nineteen

From all past sorrow granted full release And gave a heart that, giving, understands. I ask no more, for then my soul put by All of its passionate quest and wild disdain Of life as it must be. I knew again That Joy lives on forever, though men die. The old grim plaint that we are transient things Born in sore anguish, driven down the years, Was quite dispelled. I guessed the truth that tears Are jewels worn by gods who once knew wings. Love in her fulness does her mystic wonders Unseen, past explanation, all-unguessed. Until we hear, beyond Death's dinning thunders. Her Voice that whispers: Life is Love, then Rest. Devoid of shame I own I often loved. Seldom in vain, but never passing this, Never with all the spirit's deeps so moved, Never before, a god creating bliss.

Within this poem I nothing spared, but said Ever the truth as poets used to do; I left no hallowed memory with the dead, For in brief life those riches are too few. The Man of Stratford said that not to love Was "treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth—For where is any author in the world Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?" In the sweet middle way that wisdom shows, Far from base licence, chill austerity, And all the forces that contemn the soul, We find a Joy that vanquishes all woe, A crown of life, a Recompense 'gainst death.

The precious hours of life that I had known Taught me to judge the value of this last, For all were but dear lessons, here full learned; These, these were all, even the wondrous first, Sweet buds of April, opening one by one, Closed in the briefest while, forerunners of The flame-filled heart of one great summer-rose. I worshipped long in a devotion deep, Rose up, and parted wide the curtains, saw The blue-green Bow still winding far away, Cascade and Rundle standing giants' guard. I heard anew the everlasting roar Of those wild Falls, and far above them smiling The slumbrous stars persuading dreamful sleep.

I yearned to rest, but something seemed to say: "The mountains look upon man's transient loves, And sorrow comes within their granite hearts. Moveless, impassive, omnipresent gods, They stood beyond the window whispering: "Think of the countless aeons that we have watched, From formless infancy, the giant steps Of glacial years. Think, we shall yet be here A hundred centuries when you are dust. Man is an atom, an unheeded mote; Woman, the wisp of light that makes him seen. The stars, the rivers, and the hills endure; Man passes like a breath in wintry air." I hid my face in beauty, and my spirit Fled outward once again, and cried to them: "Eternal sentinels, the mind of man Shall pass from star to star when valleys trench The space where your proud summits are upreared. Shakespeare dies not; Plato and Socrates Knew wisdom when grim glaciers lined your brows. Shelley sings on, and Keats forever sings. The thunders that enfold your massive peaks Were empty noise had Milton never lived, Beethoven toiled to tell of suffering." Their deep hostility did trouble me, And then truth came as comes the lightning-flash: These were complete, but man must still evolve, Must weep and toil, fall and rise up again, Face life and death until the Race becomes Worthy of Him who shaped the universe. Man is God's pilgrim toward eternity, His burdens weakness, hatred, ignorance, His goal a vast and shining mystery. He is a wayfarer who doth forget His destination and the path fixed thither Until God's amulet within his hand, Recalls his quest and purpose unto mind.

### VII

### RETURN

Long afterward I journeyed west again, In passionate hopefulness to hear once more That song of happiness translating earth.

Twenty-one

Vain was my quest, as one who walks afar On autumn days and hopes to find the spring. The most sublime of hours in mortal life Approach unseen, and drop their sombre veils—Suddenly to stand in dazzling loveliness, To make all earth a realm of radiance, And then forever pass.

My glory fled,
My trouble lingered on. How dare I face
Those awesome giants there awaiting me?
Hostile before, and whirling mighty slings
They hurled grim stones in love's enchanted bower.
And now—? I shrank and thought to see them rise,
Mocking my sorrow and my desolate heart;
For She, being far, I would be easy prey
To Beings that scorned my insignificance . . .

Again I saw their far magnificence Like some incredible unmoving sea, Or heights of dimly-dreamt immortal realms Whither man might strive, and ultimately hope To be as wise as God, never to know Of littleness in word, or thought or deed, Forever from endless sorrow to be free, To be beyond the claws of circumstance, The scope of fear, the paltry thrill of pride, Beyond the treacheries of tide and time; Finally, to rest as these eternal Shapes, These vast perpetuations of God's thought, Heeding nor caring aught how mortals fare. These things alone are perfect, for they stand Great of themselves, greatly against the years, Unchanged by changing seasons, unforgiving, They tower like gods, grey fingers on their lips, Imposing on the meanest of mankind The silence of their immortality.

# VIII

O all you lonely over all the world,
For whose unlustred eye the crimson sun
Drops sallow unto rest! You lonely hearts,
Living again the sweet, the kindlier past,
When each young day an unbroached flagon was,

Twenty-two

And every night a crystal brimming red With all the untouched wine of wonderment; You who climb dully with a leaden heel The spirit's hillock and look westward far To fabled Isles of fair Hesperides; You whose poor arms are empty evermore Save when they cradle a beloved ghost, Be comforted in this: Thus to have loved And to have gladly given all, but once, Is life's rare privilege. To have watched the flames Consume the holiest, freely-proffered gift Spread on the altar raised to Loveliness, Is pure devotion, asking no reward, Save the full realization of itself. Then, head erect, unbowed if sorrowful, To front the morning and to meet the night, Clear-eyed and unreluctant, half-content To mourn the unreturning evermore. If 'tis the lover's lot to joy and weep, It is his triumph to carve noble thought In sorrow's granite. This remember most: Dull daily usage frets the keenest edge And even love must alter day to day, Forward or back, progress through constant change. Thrice blest the one who, as a youthful knight, Falls early in the conflict, ardent still, "What might have been" his last and strongest thought. Wisdom has proven ever in the close That the frustrated and the thwarted are Ever most fortunate, being unsatisfied And when the heaven of great love gratified Becomes a long and aching lonely hell A poet will transfigure that in song.

To be a poet is to stand apart,
Midway 'twixt God and Man, and, standing, know
One has the love of neither; 'tis to be
Heedless of either's thanks, yet ever eager
To sing the beauties manifest in each,
That men may grow a little more like gods,
That God may bend a handsbreadth nearer Man.

Finis

### Shorter Poems

### YEAR'S END

THE year is dead, for Death slays even time, And was it not a proud and foolish thing To cry "We love forever?"—'Twas sublime, For there's no heart that may forever sing; One sweet, tremendous, transient hour of love Is worth a thousand unawakened years; One perfect memory shall eternal prove, However deep the price we pay in tears.

Life is an envious miser, and he guards
The wonder-stone of love with jealous pride,
And only the courageous pass his wards
To wear the jewel for which great kings have died;
Thus, having known the best that life affords,
We have done more than make the seas divide.

### FOREVER

FOREVER! Well, I know it must be so.
You pass, a song that fades far down the night;
Once we were happy—that was long ago.
I loved you from your first kiss to the last.
You left me, yet I loved you more each hour,
And hold you still, a blind man with a flower
Who never shall forget that spring long past.

God is so strange—if there is any god—
To burn two little stars in one great flame,
Then quench them in the ocean of the years . . .
And yet I know above my burial sod
The very grass shall glow to feel your name,
And on my face the rain shall be your tears.

# TO ONE WHO HAS MARRIED

ALTHOUGH to-night I may mean less to you Than some poor vagrant wind about the house, At times you'll hear me gnaw my passage through The years' dim wall, a most unwelcome mouse. Rest, comfort, peace, and marriage—build them firm,

Twenty-four

Yet in the wainscot of your woman's mind Nightly I'll creep forever, throughout life's term And whisper afterwards on Death's pale wind.

Your nothing, love, is my eternity, Your long-dead yesterday my live to-morrow, My one kept gift that immortality For one who ringed me with immortal sorrow.

Yet live, my love, for none are like you ever, Perhaps because perhaps you're lost forever.

### SPRING SONG

WHEN Winter's chill is overpast And crocuses come out at last, Blow on the hills demurely bright, Smile jocund to the stars by night— The songs of Spring wake in delight.

When the shy snowdrops first appear To beckon in the modest year, And when bright tulips gaily show Their pagan vanguard after snow, All heaven envies earth below.

April, intangible and sweet, Comes dancing by on silver feet; How fair the melody she plays On singing streams those dream-like days When young winds stir the browns and greys.

The countryside, so fairer grown, Puts off her winter bridal-gown As over wood and field the green Steals silent, lovely and unseen, Until all earth's one magic sheen.

With May and June the daffodils Dance golden on the gleaming hills, While daisy, lily, violet, Fresh lilac and fair mignonette Banish the lonely heart's regret.

Twenty-five

### TO GILDA RETURNING

SINCE I have touched my lips again to yours
And breathed again the fragrance that you are,
I feel as one who fills his ivory ewers
In crystal depths that mirror one white star.

Since I have known your sweetness once again And, in the midnight's rich enchanted shade, Felt fall your golden loveliness like rain Soft-streaming on green leaves in Grecian glade,

I live in beauty that can never die,
And you have dried an everlasting tear,
Have stilled awhile that strange eternal cry
And woven your spell on sorrows far and near.

You give me back a jewel, a wonder-stone, Hush all my fears, and kindle bright for me The precious fire I cannot keep alone, Whose flame is song, whose light solemnity.

I drink the goblet that my dreams have filled,
You pour its wine upon my eager lips,
The strings of all my panting soul are thrilled—
I clasp the moment ere its wonder slips.

Your beauty is a fountain of delight
That rises fairylike, a graceful flower,
A golden rose that blossoms in the night,
A bud whose lifetime is one magic hour,

A petal floating happily on the waves, A star above life's long and level sea, A spirit over all lost lovers' graves, A lovely elfin soul divine and free.

You give fresh life to my imaginings,
All beauties of the world are in your kiss—
More treasure than the wealth of eastern kings,
Who knew no yielding beauty sweet as this.

And when you leave me, I have left all joy
Until you re-awaken in my heart
The simple sorrow of a lonely boy
Who sees the princess of his dreams depart.

Twenty-six

A Charles Athles A Charles

### TWILIGHT NOON

AST night I dreamed of you, and still my heart
Throbs all this waking day with that same power
God gave us for one far ecstatic hour,
When, loving, we of loveliness were part.

I sit alone before the fire, I start,
Tremble, and see in memory's still bower
You whispering, as of old, more soft and lower,
The words of love's immeasurable art.

Here on this island, fair as Paradise,
Something from earth's best beauty's fled and gone,
And there's half-twilight in the richest skies,
And shadows lie upon the sunniest lawn—
I miss the perfect glory in your eyes
That drew all heaven into Western dawn.

### \* \* \* FAREWELL

KNOW one warm red jewel of joyous May:
The rose in youth, in beauty, in first flower,
Vieing her blush with sunrise one brief hour,
Dew-pearled with dawn's pale tears at break of day,
Grace in each petal, love that breathes away
A fragrance filling garden, tree and bower
Ere, drooped in storm and passion that deflower,
Slow-falling leaf and bloom find death's dark way.

So, love, in all thy virgin shining charms
That richest praise from earth and heaven warms
Fate summons thee, in dust to don repose.
Then take as obsequies my sighs, my tears,
This vase of dew, this bud the May-month wears
That on Death's couch thou still shalt sleep, a rose.

# NO POET SAID:

BREAK with me now—forget that I'm alive,
Or that you placed your peace within my keeping.
Break with me now—that less you must forgive,
For after sharpest pain there's deepest sleeping,
Dear, let me go—and going quietly,
I'll prove myself the only kindly lover
In sacrificing all my ecstasy
Before its virgin wonder all was over.

Twenty-seven

Dear, I must go alone, and travel far,
Rival the winds in bitter pilgrimage,
Perhaps to reach some white tremendous star,
Perhaps to live an hour, perhaps an age.
You cannot come . . . but . . . in the far years . . . keep
Those songs I left to lull your fears asleep.

### \* \* \*

### ONLY SILENCE ANSWERS

I

DO YOU remember once, a strange night in December,
Warm for the time of year, we walked your garden round,
Light wind was blowing the fine snow, do you remember—?
The great bare poplars whispered to the wind . . . That
sound
Drifts back across my peace, speaks in my loneliness;
I still can see the light of all those myriad stars,
And deeper light was in your eyes . . . your loveliness
Stirred me as summer sea stirs all its sanded bars.

### II

Whenever midnight comes, stealing with stars and wind,
Wind moving lightly in the listening poplars, then
I shall be in your garden, walking there to find
The glory that lives once and never comes again.
Only when, from the page of some old treasured poem
That once you read to me, I hear your voice sound low,
Break with the heart-break of the weary world, and come
Back like the tragedy of princes—then I know!

#### III

Know that to love too well, one heart may love too long
And so forget there is a thing on earth but love,
That nothing's left the weak in triumph of the strong,
That, as the truant wind, a woman's heart may move
From one she loved beyond her very self. . . . And yet
The poplars whisper still that once, in one December,
Two lovers wandered there . . . and does the wind forget
As one long since, or does the wind, with me, remember?
Twenty-eight

### MY FRIEND

AST time I saw you, Harold, that afternoon Of April sunlight on the tennis-ground, Then through the leaves the wind its merry tune Sang on; we played with rush and bound. Your smile, when losing, was a victory. Ever the same your boyish laughter sped; Then we were young—and youth was ecstasy!—When next I saw you, you were lying dead. Dark and discoloured, dead and still forever, Silent and meaningless, all earth you were—What if I still can run, laugh, love, if ever Some day I must, like you, be stiffening there, Clod to all loveliness, insensate earth, Mattering no more than long before my birth—

\* \* \*

### **FUTILITY**

WHAT is the meaning of the course we run
On this faint track that winds to nothingness?
For none are satisfied when all is done,
And there is little left of loveliness,
When all the dreams one ever had are gone,
When each bright vision meets reality;
All nights of wonder die in dreary dawn
Where every glory is what cannot be.
The longing infinite, the kiss of rain,
Of woman, sunrise, and of fame's brief fire
Are each a madness that will lie again
And burn the dreamer on his builded pyre;
Since man's best hopes are vain Icarian wings
That bear him high to deathless, mocking things.

### THE LAMPMAN CAIRN AT MORPETH

BUILD high this cairn, for here was Lampman born, Here fell that silver seed of high endeavor, Here first he raised that echoing golden horn; Beauty his creed, and truth his sign forever.

Here he first heard the secrets of the Spring
Whose white feet passed between the early flowers,
And listened as the April winds would sing
The lyric of a poet's childhood hours.

Little he gained of gold, that lustrous sign
Of all the world's acclaim—yet in the mind
He was a Crossus of pure song, whose arts
To poets' hands the wandering winds resign.
These touched him and he is forever enshrined
Imperishable in Canadian hearts.

#### \* \* \*

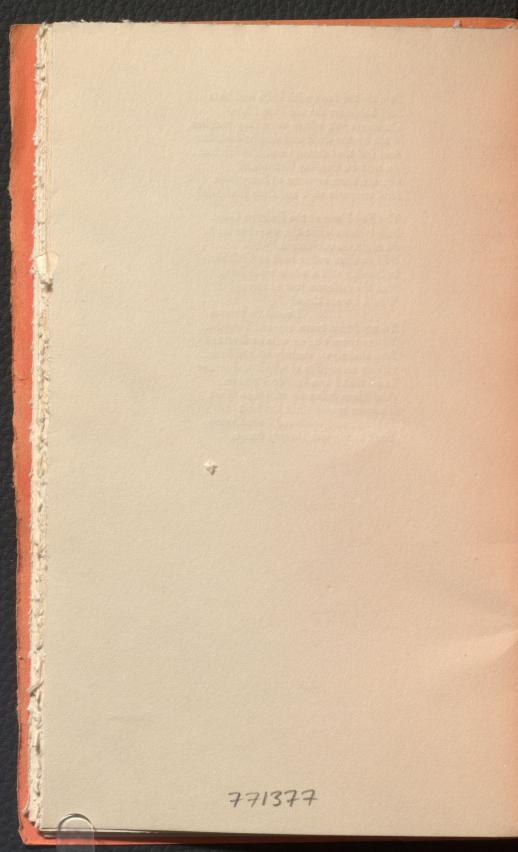
# THE OLD HAMLET, TORONTO (Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, July, 1929)

TUST now the prairies are in bloom As I sit in my lonely room, While in Toronto now, I think, The highbrows gather still, to drink; The intelligentsia's keen quorum Murmurs above the latest Forum, While in the studios foregather Some who might sculp and paint, yet rather In fair discussion stretch the mind, Knowing that effort's unrefined. Oh, there the righteous wear a robe As stainless as the godly Globe. And there the good without a scar Turn to the comics in the Star. O darn! I know it and I know The great red street-cars stop and go With their immeasurable calm Through many a hopeless traffic jalm; There old Big Ben still booms his hours, And Varsity's green fields and towers Breathe all their ancient storied charm On starry summer nights and warm. The Family Compact gathers still Serene and splendid on The Hill.

Say, do the boys with balls and bats Still battle on the old Don Flats? Do lovers yet, whom none may number, Walk by the dark and singing Humber And feel that strange and childish fear To look on sleeping Grenadier? Oh, are there screams at Sunnyside And tempests still, and Sam McBride?

The Fog-Horn at the Eastern Gap Still bellows while the wavelets lap? At night do adolescent "wilds" Still swallow coffee neat at Childs? Is Sunday still a whole week long, And the Alliance just as strong? Would I were there!

I must go pronto
To my home town, my old Toronto,
Where there's a few who understand
And shake you warmly by the hand,
Giving some gifts of which a shortage
Is all that I can find on Portage.
Ambitious lads may still turn West
To open spaces—but the best
Is there, and eastward I shall roam
Back to my old Toronto home.



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